Social movements changing eyecare awareness

BY U LEO CHANDA AND VARTIKA GARG

Throughout recent years, the rise of the digital age has allowed for social movements to receive far greater awareness than was ever deemed possible. As a result, significant attention has been drawn towards initiatives focusing on a range of health issues, including eyecare. In addition to increasing public education regarding ocular health, these movements may also help provide support for underserved populations and boost awareness of preventable blindness, thus transforming the landscape of global eye health. Here are our top five influential social movements that are making a difference in eyecare awareness:

1. #Vision2020: The global initiative for the elimination of avoidable blindness

Vision 2020 is a global initiative launched by the World Health Organization (WHO) in collaboration with the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB) with the key aim of eliminating avoidable blindness in countries where the burden of such disease is severe. This movement has advocated for the incorporation of eyecare and education into national health systems across a variety of developing countries. The initiation of programmes backed by some of the largest pharmaceutical companies (including Pfizer and Merck) have allowed substantial donations of medications such as ivermectin and azithromycin to be provided in order to tackle the burden of onchocerciasis and trachoma. As of October 21, 2024, 21 countries have been classed by WHO as having eliminated trachoma as a public health issue, with 2030 being set as the new target for worldwide elimination of blindness secondary to trachoma [1].

2. #EyecareEverywhere: Advocating for universal eye health coverage

Another initiative launched by the IAPB, #EyecareEverywhere advocates for the inclusion of ocular health services in universal health coverage, with the singular

goal of ensuring that all individuals regardless of income or background can access affordable eyecare. This movement accentuates the idea that eye health is a vital component of overall physical and mental wellbeing. The campaign highlights the importance of regular screening for causes of preventable irreversible blindness, such as diabetic retinopathy and glaucoma. #EyecareEverywhere runs global events such as World Sight Day [2], raising awareness that eyecare services are required urgently in remote and less privileged communities, and has achieved success in mobilising governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to prioritise eyecare in their public health strategies.

3. Sightsavers: Promoting eyecare equality in low-income communities

Sightsavers is an international NGO that promotes fair access to eyecare in low-income communities, thus benefiting marginalised groups. A significant aim of this movement is to reduce the gap in eye health services between affluent and underprivileged populations. Furthermore, the focus of this movement is to raise awareness and increase education regarding treatable eye conditions such as vitamin A deficiency and cataracts, which disproportionately impact the poor. This movement also pushes for long-term

policy reforms that integrate eyecare into wider, more sustainable community-driven eyecare programmes. The initiation of free or inexpensive eyecare facilities and resource distribution amongst these disadvantaged groups has allowed a marked reduction in the disparity between these populations [3], paving the way for a more equitable future in global ocular health.

4. Save Your Vision Month: Raising awareness about screen time and digital eye strain

In a world where screen usage due to digital work, education, and entertainment has increased exponentially, Save Your Vision Month is a movement sponsored by the American Optometric Association that seeks to increase knowledge of how extended screen time negatively impacts eye health. A rising number of people are concerned about 'digital eye strain' (also known as computer vision syndrome), which can lead to symptoms such as headaches, blurred vision, and dry eyes. The campaign informs people about easy yet powerful ways to lessen these symptoms, e.g. making sure your screen is ergonomically correct and following the '20-20-20' rule [4], which states that every 20 minutes, you should look at something 20 feet away for a duration of 20 seconds. In addition, Save Your

Vision Month highlights the long-term dangers of excessive screen time for children, as prolonged gadget use has been linked to increasing rates of myopia. In an increasingly tech-reliant world, this campaign encourages individuals to take proactive measures to safeguard their eye health by promoting healthier digital habits.

5. Sight for Kids

The ground-breaking initiative Sight for Kids aims to prevent childhood blindness by identifying and treating vision issues early. Founded in 2002 by Johnson & Johnson Vision and Lions Clubs International Foundation, this initiative is one of the largest school-based eye health programmes on a global level. By offering free eye tests, health education, and essential treatments such as glasses and surgeries, it aims to reduce avoidable blindness and visual impairment among the youth. To ensure that children receive prompt treatment for illnesses such as refractive errors and childhood cataracts, Sight for Kids has trained teachers and healthcare professionals in underprivileged areas to recognise vision problems early. This programme has had a major influence on childhood eye health worldwide, having screened over 50 million children [5].

Conclusion

The five social movements above have had a significant effect on access to and understanding of ocular health on a global scale. Whether encouraging fair access to care, increasing education regarding avoidable illnesses, or pushing for reasonably priced therapies, these projects are transforming the global landscape of eye health. Through public education and policy influence, these movements are helping to ensure that vision care becomes a priority in public health, which will ultimately lessen the prevalence of blindness and enhance the lives of millions of people worldwide.

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[All links last accessed January 2025]

AUTHORS

U Leo Chanda*,
FY2 Doctor, Royal Wolverhampton Trust, UK.

Vartika Garg*,
FY2 Doctor, Royal Wolverhampton Trust, UK.

*Co-first authors

SECTION EDITOR

Paras Agarwal,
Ophthalmology Registrar, Mersey Deanery, UK.
paras.agarwal@nhs.net

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